

TREETOPS LEARNING COMMUNITY

GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

Scope of responsibility

As trustees, we acknowledge we have overall responsibility for ensuring that Treetops Learning Community has an effective and appropriate system of control, financial and otherwise. However, such a system is designed to manage rather than eliminate the risk of failure to achieve business objectives, and can provide only reasonable and not absolute assurance against material misstatement or loss.

The board of trustees has delegated the day-to-day responsibility to the CEO, as accounting officer, for ensuring financial controls conform with the requirements of both propriety and good financial management and in accordance with the requirements and responsibilities assigned to it in the funding agreement between Treetops Learning Community and the Secretary of State for Education. They are also responsible for reporting to the board of trustees any material weaknesses or breakdowns in internal control.

Governance

The information on governance included here supplements that described in the Trustees' Report and in the Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities. The board of trustees has formally met five times during the year. Attendance during the year at meetings of the board of trustees was as follows:

Trustees	Meetings attended	Out of possible
Mrs A Ochuma	3	5
Mr K Mohammed	3	5
Mr N Woodbridge	3	5
Mr P Smith (Accounting Officer)	5	5
Mrs S Slade	5	5
Mr K Brice	3	5
Mr A Peaford (Chair)	5	5
Mr D Landy	0	5
Mr C F Morgan	3	5
Mr I Dickson	1	5

During the year to 31 August 2023 the Board has had no resignations and no new appointees. The board has exercised its duty in scrutinizing the work of the school and helping them raise standards.

The board has scrutinised educational performance, financial performance and regularity and effective deployment of resources.

Conflicts of interest

Any conflicts of interests or related party transactions will be identified through the annual completion of the declaration forms. This is also an agenda item on every Governor meeting allowing for dialogue and discussion. Any conflict would be debated and a solution identified inline with each situation.

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GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

Governance reviews

The board's performance has been good although it has reduced the number of staff governors and strengthened its numbers due to the opening of the Free School.

The board regularly received monitoring reports in addition to the monthly financial reports, which provide the board with added confidence.

The Trust has completed a self-review of governance in the past six months which has led to a strengthening of local governance arrangements.

The impact of the changes are that from December 2023 there will be two Local Governing Bodies, one for each school chaired by Neil Woodbridge and Kevin Brice, these will contain, the Headteacher of the relevant LGB school, a community governor, a parent governor and two staff governors.

The Trust will complete further reviews in the next twelve months to assess the effectiveness of these changes and the performance of its committees also.

As well as the five full board meetings held during the year, the academy has set up sub-committees that have also met periodically throughout the period.

The finance, premises and audit committee is a sub-committee of the main board of trustees.

The purpose of the finance, premises and audit committee is:

Ensure that accurate and complete financial records are maintained

- Monitor income and expenditures against projections
- Review and recommend financial policies to the board, including ensuring adequate internal controls and maintaining financial records in accordance with standard accounting practices

Ensure that accurate, timely, and meaningful financial statements are prepared and presented to the board

- Present monthly financial statements to the board

Safeguard the Organisation's asset's

- Review proposed new funding for ongoing financial implications, recommending approval or disapproval to the board
- Ensure that the Organisation has the proper risk-management provisions in place

Help the full board understand the Organisation's financial affairs

- Ensure that the board as a whole is well informed about the Organisation's finances
- Educate the board about financial matters

Ensure that premises matters are monitored and dealt with in a timely fashion

Monitor premises management and health & safety matters to ensure compliance

Attendance at meetings in the year was as follows:

Trustees	Meetings attended	Out of possible
Mr K Mohammed	4	5
Mr N Woodbridge	5	5
Mr P Smith (Accounting Officer)	5	5
Mrs S Slade	5	5
Mr K Brice	4	5
Mr C F Morgan	5	5

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GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (CONTINUED)

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Review of value for money

As accounting officer, the CEO has responsibility for ensuring that the academy trust delivers good value in the use of public resources. The accounting officer understands that value for money refers to the educational and wider societal outcomes, as well as estates safety and management, achieved in return for the taxpayer resources received.

The accounting officer considers how the academy trust's use of its resources has provided good value for money during each academic year, and reports to the board of trustees where value for money can be improved, including the use of benchmarking data where available. The accounting officer for the academy trust has delivered improved value for money during the year by:

- Monitoring procedures and financial reports and ensuring regular benchmarking is undertaken.

The accounting officer has ensured the Trust has effectively used funding to ensure that the site is well maintained and safe. The Trust employs specialised Companies to check that the site has no on-going problems and that the maintenance is all up to date. The Trust buys in to Essex County Council safety advisors who are always on hand should the Site Manager need extra advice on Health and Safety issues and the Trustees, one in particular, is proactive in visiting site to check on any Health and Safety problems.

The purpose of the system of internal control

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives. It can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of academy trust policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. The system of internal control has been in place in Treetops Learning Community for the period 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and accounts.

Capacity to handle risk

The board of trustees has reviewed the key risks to which the academy trust is exposed together with the operating, financial and compliance controls that have been implemented to mitigate those risks. The board of trustees is of the view that there is a formal ongoing process for identifying, evaluating and managing the academy trust's significant risks that has been in place for the period 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and accounts. This process is regularly reviewed by the board of trustees.

The risk and control framework

The academy trust's system of internal financial control is based on a framework of regular management information and administrative procedures including the segregation of duties and a system of delegation and accountability. In particular, it includes:

- comprehensive budgeting and monitoring systems with an annual budget and periodic financial reports which are reviewed and agreed by the board of trustees;
- regular reviews by the finance, premises and audit committee of reports which indicate financial performance against the forecasts and of major purchase plans, capital works and expenditure programmes;
- setting targets to measure financial and other performance;
- clearly defined purchasing (asset purchase or capital investment) guidelines;
- identification and management of risks.

The Governing Body has considered the need for a specific internal audit function and has decided not to appoint a Responsible Officer. However, the Governors have appointed SBM Services to complete the internal audit function. SBM Services role includes giving advice on financial matters and performing a range of checks on the Academy Trust's financial systems. In particular the checks carried out in the current period include:

- Payroll
- Banking, Investment management
- Cash Flow & Reconciliations

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SBM services report to the Governing body on the operation of the systems of control and on the discharge of the Governing Body's financial responsibilities.

The Trustees' confirm the internal auditor has delivered their schedule of work as planned, and no material control issues arose as a result of the internal auditor's work.

During the year the following reviews have also been carried out:

Internal checks on Safeguarding
Internal review of Health and Safety

Review of effectiveness

As accounting officer the CEO has responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control. During the year in question the review has been informed by:

- the work of the external auditor;
- the financial management and governance self-assessment process;
- the work of the executive managers within the academy trust who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework.

The accounting officer has been advised of the implications of the result of their review of the system of internal control by the finance and general purposes committee and a plan to address weaknesses and ensure continuous improvement of the system is in place.

Approved by order of the board of trustees on 11 December 2023 and signed on its behalf by:

Mr P Smith
Accounting Officer

Mr A Peaford
Chair